THE PEDDARS WAY

(*A guide for walkers*)

by Bruce Robinson

('*Clement Court*' *of the Eastern Daily Press*)

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To my wife and family, who let me go on the Way; and to Jack Wilton and George Gawlinski, who came with me.

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Introduction

The fact that you have bought this booklet indicates at least a passing interest in our countryside and in its history, its present and its future.

In a curious and yet delightful sort of way the Peddars Way links all these aspects. Its history is fascinating and largely obscure; it is presently beautiful in its haunting loneliness; while its future is exciting, perhaps, as more and more people seek its quiet pleasures. In addition, its penetrating line and basic straight-forwardness tends to link, in a sort of cross section of Norfolk, forest with farm and farm with seashore. Thus the Peddars Way can indeed be all things to all men.

The present Way—or the route I am going to describe—runs for roughly 50 miles from the Suffolk border to the shores of North West Norfolk, of which distance perhaps 30 miles is along the line of the old track itself. The difference—and because there are gaps in the Way—is made up by diverting along country lanes and minor roads. Originally, of course, the Peddars Way was much more substantial, more important, and much longer than it is now, but this booklet looks basically at those sections which are generally available for walking, and thus in essence restricts itself to that part of the Way which now runs from Knettishall on the Suffolk border across country to Holme-next-Sea.

The booklet contains a short historical essay, a map and route section, and a section of useful information. The figures in parentheses in the essay refer to titles in the bibliography on page 16. As for the Way, its southerly beginning is in heathland and breck as it skirts the Forestry Commission's Thetford Forest. Following the Brecklands roughly as far as the Swaffham area, the track climbs over Massingham and Harpley before reaching the coast. There are fine views over a surrounding countryside agriculturally and historically rich, and an abundance of wildlife. Thus the pleasures of the Way include its views, its skies, its lonely paths, its history, its wildlife, and the pubs in nearby villages.

This is not, nor was ever intended to be, a work of scholarship. It is intended, however, to be a brief account of the Way and of the enjoyment I and others have derived from it, together with such facts, theories and arguments I have collected along the track or gleaned from the works of others. To all of them, I am most grateful. More than anything else, however, it was a labour of love, and should be read in that spirit. If, in the meantime, it adds in any small measure to the enjoyment to be obtained and found in your walking on the Peddars Way, then it will have served its purpose.

A History of the Way

From the flat sheet of a map, at least, the Peddars Way looks as straight as a piece of string; but that is only part of the story. The walker will confirm it is not as straight and as clear cut as it seems. If he also pauses to reflect he will probably agree, too, that it is a road with no beginning, no certainty, and no end. A mysterious road, then, as all roads are, ancient and beautiful, which has survived perhaps because it does lead nowhere across a sparsely populated landscape.

To attempt to answer some of the questions, however, it is necessary to go back to man's first appearance in East Anglia—probably between 400,000 and 500,000 years ago—and to that immense period of time when the region was in the intermittent grip of successive Ice Ages. They rippled massively across the landscape, and when they did finally retreat they left behind a huge chalk escarpment which, as time advanced, came to play an increasingly important role.

It was this area which first attracted man. For one thing thick broadleaf forests covered the rest of the countryside, while Breckland, with its lighter soils, was relatively free of dense woodland. The numerous river valleys in the vicinity were another attraction; yet another was the presence of flint. By the time Neolithic man arrived, the low-lying fen linking East Anglia to the Continent had been flooded by the sea. (The remains of ancient forests can still be seen off-shore at Thornham and Titchwell.) In the light woodland areas, however, the land could be cleared by the "slash and burn" technique, and the soil tilled. When the soil was exhausted, the people moved on, and it was this, and the grazing of stock, which helped to prevent regeneration of the woodland and so create the sandy heaths.

These inhabitants mined flint at Grimes Graves, near Lynford, and at Great Massingham, and built their barrows, and it was probably at about this time, too, that because of the constant movement of people and goods between Wessex and the chalk ridge of Suffolk and West Norfolk, that there gradually came to be formed a series of trackways later to be known as the Icknield Way. Rainbird Clarke (1) says, "Hunstanton was not the northern terminus of this route, for the presence of prehistoric trackways and Roman roads continuing on the Lincolnshire Wolds strongly suggest that some ferry service across the mouth of the Wash, then narrower than it is at present, linked Norfolk with Lincolnshire". So the picture was one of considerable activity and development which continued throughout the Bronze Age—when stock was improved and cereal yields increased—and throughout the Iron Age, which again saw a concentration of activity in Breckland, and indeed throughout North West Norfolk.

After 500 BC successive invasions changed the picture again. Gradually, and particularly from about 100 BC, the region saw the establishment of the tribal systems of the Catuvellauni, who annexed south Cambridgeshire and spread along the ridge into Suffolk, the Trinovantes, further to the south, and eventually the Iceni who, though their seat of power is still unknown, concentrated in West Norfolk and

West Suffolk. The constant warring between the Belgic tribes saw no respite until the first Roman invasion; nevertheless, between them, and between the wars, they established settlements, created an aristocracy, introduced coinage and built, among other places, Verulamium (St Albans) and Camulodunum (Colchester). Therefore, and despite an obvious absence of massive stone circles and hilltop fortresses, the regional picture by the time of the Roman invasions was one of considerable development. Communications were established, settled farming was a way of life, large areas of forest had been cleared, and the tribes were warring; and everywhere throughout the area today can still be found abundant evidence of these apparently inevitable human activities.

It is convenient at this point to consider the question, "Is the Peddars Way pre-Roman in origin?" It is basically unanswerable. Norfolk is criss-crossed by the remnants of early lines of communication, once important but largely abandoned or lost, and it is certainly not difficult to point to sites of antiquity beside both the Icknield Way (which curves at its north-western end to within a short distance of the Peddars and which, by implication, attended the same, or a similar, port of call) and the Peddars itself; and it does not take much imagination to suppose that the wandering Icknield and the more direct line of the Peddars were both part of a much used line of general communication. At Woodcock Hall, near Saham Toney ((2), Oct. 4th, 1976), for example, there is evidence of pre-Roman activity; while Sedgeford, Massingham and so on also indicate a pre-Roman presence. But to say that the Way, or even part of it, is pre-Roman is perhaps to be a trifle too dogmatic. If the area, and the general direction, was in wide and important use then it seems reasonable to suppose there were well-used tracks in the vicinity. For the moment, however, there is no evidence to suggest the Romans utilised any of them in the building of the Way.

In 1914, R. Hippisley Cox (3) put forward a theory of a more sophisticated form of communication. He claimed that explanations that earthworks were tribal strongholds used for local purposes were impossible to maintain. "These hill forts," he wrote, "are obviously arranged systematically along the watersheds, and there is much evidence to prove that they were connected together by a fully developed system of travel-ways." He argued that the watersheds were used until the advent of better drainage and wheeled transport made it easier to keep to the level valleys, and a similar point was developed a few years later by Alfred Watkins (4) when he introduced the subject of ley-lines, or surface sighting points.

His theory, to my mind, fails for several reasons: statistical probability (if you cover a piece of paper with random dots it is usually easy to find four in a line); time scale (markstones, tumuli, earthworks, moats, churches, etc., represent sites separated by hundreds of years); improbability (many possible leys would seem to serve no logical purpose); and pattern (how do you impose a ley-line superstructure on the known pattern of early history?). Anyway, and for my own peace of mind, I spent an hour with a pencil and ruler pouring over a one-inch map of the Way. Potential ley-lines there were in plenty (over 20 discovered in one session) but other than two main concentrations (one near Harpley and another, roughly, between Watton and the Pickenhams), I found nothing to suggest any real relation to it.

Whatever the truth, all must have been pushed to the background when Caesar launched his reconnaissance raids. Neither apparently troubled the Iceni from a military point of view, but they would certainly have been troubled in AD 43 when the armies of Claudian Rome returned again, this time in strength. This time, too, the gradual subjugation of the islands began. The territory occupied by the warlike Catuvellauni was annexed by the Romans but the Iceni, by treaty, survived as a kingdom for a further 20 years despite an abortive revolt in circa AD 49. Rainbird

Between Ringstead and Sedgeford the path edges across several fields.

Clarke (1) comments that Roman military control appears to have extended about as far as the thick woodlands of Suffolk, while the Iceni, perhaps led by Saemu, sought and were granted a treaty of protection; thus, with their right flank apparently secure, the Romans could advance into the Midlands. Probably in alliance with the Coritani of the Midlands, however, the Iceni seem to have risen and Saemu—perhaps killed in the exchanges—seems to have been replaced by Prasutagus.

About AD 60, however, Prasutagus died, and his passing precipitated a crisis. As a dependant monarch he was unable to bequeath his kingdom, but in an attempt to ensure that his two daughters would at least share part of his estate, he left half to Nero. Army officers, civil servants and external pressures, though, frustrated the plan. The tribal area was over-run. Its aristocracy was reduced to slavery and the settlements reduced to ashes; the daughters of Prasutagus were raped and, so the story goes, Queen Boudicca was flogged. Not surprisingly the Iceni, together with neighbouring tribes, rose a second time, and this time their chances must have seemed brighter.

To begin with they had at their head a remarkable queen who evidently possessed the personality to rally the tribes, and they had a temporary military advantage, for at that time the 14th and 20th legions were with Suetonius Paulinus on his Welsh campaign, the 2nd was at Gloucester, and Petilius Cerialis was with the 9th at Lincoln. For a moment the Romans were off-balance, and the tribes marched. Colchester, the centre of Roman authority, was cruelly put to the sword. Suetonius was a month distant and the 9th (Lincoln) 120 miles away. Nevertheless, the 9th marched and Boudicca turned to meet them. When finally they met, the Roman infantry were slaughtered and Petilius Cerialis barely escaped with his cavalry.

Hearing the news, Suetonius rushed south and ordered the 2nd Augusta to join him. For some reason the Gloucester commander did not comply. When Suetonius heard that Boudicca had again turned south he abandoned London, which he could not defend, and so left it, and St. Albans, to their fate. Both were sacked in an orgy of slaughter and destruction. Heavily outnumbered, Suetonius evidently elected to fight a set-piece battle in a favourable position. He chose a site by a wood, and when Boudicca and her people finally came the day was long and bloody. But Roman discipline and tactical skill triumphed, and at the end of it the Iceni and their allies were slaughtered, or forced to flee. The rout was complete.

As for Boudicca, some say she committed suicide and was buried in an unknown grave. We may never know. Yet she still remains fresh in folklore, as much a mystery now as she was a thorn in the side of the Romans. A. J. Forrest (5) lists four possible burial places—Parliament Hill, Bartlow Hills (Essex), Soldier's Hill at Garboldisham, and the Bubberies, Quidenham. Certainly the legend of the warlike queen has persisted, and as Forrest comments, she still clings to the area "like a veil of autumn gossamer". As for the aftermath, Churchill (6) says, "for nearly 300 years Britain, reconciled to the Roman system, enjoyed in many respects the happiest, most comfortable, and most enlightened times its inhabitants have ever had".

Ultimately that may have been true, but there is little doubt that the uprising shook the occupying forces to the core. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that Roman retribution was harsh and swift. The tribes were harried, and their settlements burned. Indeed, some accounts say many of the Iceni were sent into slavery, and it is thought possible some of them may have comprised work gangs on Roman projects in the Fens; and if so, it is reasonable to suppose that some may have been set to work on the construction of the arterial road we now call the Peddars Way.

An estimate of the date of building would seem to support it, or at least support the idea that the Way was laid down by the Romans in the years immediately following the Boudiccean uprising. Certainly independence for the area came to an end at that point, and although Romanization of East Anglia was comparatively slow until the early part of the second century, there is indication at least that road building was pressed on apace.Rainbird Clarke (1) commented that although only a few parts of the extensive network of roads had been studied, the Colchester to Caistor-by-Norwich road, at least, seemed to have been built about AD 70. He also concluded (7) "that the Peddars Way in Norfolk was constructed during Flavian times, but whether early or late in that period cannot yet be determined. This does not exclude the possibility that in the area north of Castle Acre it may partially coincide with a Bronze Age trackway . . . the Peddars Way as we know it is a Roman highway constructed during the last third of the 1st century AD."

It was a text-book Roman road driven across country without regard to native features, and it was without doubt an impressive structure. I. D. Margary (8) considered it the more important of the two roads which forked near Stanton Chair in Suffolk. Discussing the agger near Barningham he said, "Apparently the Way portion must not only have been constructed at a different date from the southern part of the road out of which it forks, but it must also have been built upon more typically Roman principles and in weightier style". He spoke of one section being 36 feet wide and another, near Fring, 45 feet wide. Construction methods differed according to the locality and the availability of materials.

Ordinarily a road was built with a bottom of large stones, often embedded in sand and covered with a surface of rammed flint. Fry (9) says the roadbuilders refused to be put off by natural obstacles, such as hills, ravines, rivers or lakes. "The route was determined by standing at the top of rising ground and selecting the direction it

Looking south, towards Castle Acre at the height of summer when the fields are parched and dusty.

would take . . . horsemen were sent off in a straight line, marking it off here and there, until they came to another bit of rising ground. The engineers and road gangs followed behind," he writes. Peel (10) observed that most Roman roads were raised on an embankment flanked on either side by a ditch. "The surveyors," he said, "used a groma, a swivelling wood cross, from whose four ends a metal weight was suspended on a cord; these weights could be aligned to check the direction given by smoke signals. When the Romans reached the Thet they slung a timber bridge across boats anchored in the stream. Had the river been wider the bridge would have been supported by stakes." Whatever the actual method, the roads were apparently good enough to allow the passage of laden carts.

A correspondent to the "Eastern Daily Press" (Jan. 1st, 1965) wrote, "During the war I supervised the laying of a water main from a bore near the railway at Harpley Dams.... The operation took far longer than anticipated, the reason being that the mechanical digger was constantly breaking down because of its encounters with huge bolders a few inches below the surface." This was on the line of the Way. The best evidence of the actual construction methods, however, comes from Brettenham where the track crossed the Thet and where a Roman camp was established. Barbara Green ((2), January, 1965) wrote, "At Brettenham it was a causeway, 16ft wide at the base and 2ft 6in thick in the centre, made of rammed flints and topped with gravel. On the east side the rammed flints continued as a path of at least 4ft wide. Another section north of the Brettenham/Bridgham road showed that the agger was constructed of a rammed chalky bolder clay with a ditch on each side." The several excavated sections showed it was a substantial construction, and that local materials were used.

Another correspondent ((2), May 3rd, 1951) told how, when working for the Great Ouse Catchment Board, he was present when the ford across the Thet was taken out. "The large flint stones were settled tight," he wrote. "Two Roman coins came out with the stones and silt. Down river about a quarter of a mile several pieces of broken unglazed pottery and horse or cattle leg bones were dredged out... I was told that another ford was taken out where the Peddars Way crossed the Little Ouse."

The excavations at Brettenham were carried out between 1932 and 1935 by Rainbird Clarke and the Rev. H. Tyrrell Green (7). The site of the settlement had been known for a long time, and many coins and other objects had been found, particularly in what was called the Money Field on the north bank of the Thet and at the point called Droveway Ford. On the Thorpe Woodlands side one trench revealed a causeway 16ft wide at the base. In the centre, under 4in of turf, were two fragments of Roman pottery lying on a convex surface of rammed flints with traces of gravel. On the east side of the trench the rammed flints continued for a further 4ft as a path.

In 1935 a trench was cut north of the Brettenham road which intercepted a bank of rammed chalky bolder clay 8ft 6in across and 3ft deep with a ditch 2ft deep and 1ft wide on both sides. Several rubbish pits were also excavated. The report concluded, "It is... possible that this section of the Roman road was destroyed in part before the close of the 14th century.... Pottery distribution strongly suggests a concentration of occupation in the 2nd and early 3rd century north of the Thet alongside the Peddars Way." It is interesting to note that no habitations were found here, though several settlements did soon grow beside the road.

Rainbird Clarke also concluded that the Way is unlikely to have been a replacement for the Icknield Way. "It is remembered," he wrote (7), "that the chief concentration of Roman settlements on the West Norfolk ridge lay a few miles west of the Peddars Way (and close to the Icknield Way). This sinuous western trackway was thus the chief route for local intercommunication between Roman villages in the area, and could not have been superseded by the Peddars Way, which avoids most of them." Prehistoric burial mounds were irrelevant to dating the Peddars Way. One is left with the feeling, therefore, that the Icknield remained for some time an important part of local Roman life (even though Thetford was of little importance to them) and that the Peddars was constructed for some specific purpose. Perhaps the Icknield did not fit the official strategic purpose; perhaps it did not take the right line, or had too many river crossings; perhaps the Romans preferred to develop or use the crossings at Brettenham and Castle Acre which might, simply, have provided them with a faster and surer route more suitable to military transport and urgent official business.

In any event, and particularly during the early pacification period, the Romans needed a planned network of routes passable in all weathers. Norman Scarfe (11) comments, "The structure is a sign of the road's importance.... They obviously wanted to supplement the Icknield Way, providing their transport with a fast route to the Wash direct from London, Chelmsford and (perhaps later) Colchester." The Victoria History, published in 1901, reasoned (12) it must have had some relation to the fort at Brancaster; and this, eventually, may have been true.

Brancaster, however, came later, and it is difficult to move away from the feeling that the real value of the Way was its purposeful and penetrating line across the Iceni tribal heartland, and from the suggestion that in Roman times the Wash was narrower and that a ferry plied the Lynn Deeps to the Lincolnshire coast. "This suggests," said Rainbird Clarke (7) "that the Peddars Way was part of a line of communication constructed after the repression of the Boudiccean revolt, from the

The Way, particularly north of Castle Acre, is criss-crossed by other roads and footpaths. It leads across this minor road by the remains of the old sign post.

Romanized area of North Essex through Iceni territory to the Wash ferry, to convey troops and other official traffic to the north of England as an alternative route to the Ermine Street. Its contribution may also have been in part government propaganda, to impress the disgruntled rebels with the might of Rome by laying out a trunk road avoiding all previous settlements.... The settlements at Castle Acre, Threxton (Woodcock Hall) and Brettenham may have been posting stations or military police posts for the traffic which flowed along this highway. Their equidistance from one another is partly due to the position of the river valleys...."

Roman forces were thinly spread, so the Peddars and the suggested Wash ferry (of which no trace has been found) would indeed provide fast communication with Lincolnshire; and its unerring line through the tribal heartland would enable troops to be moved, if needed, into the area in a very short time. This would seem to explain why (apparently, but still unproven) there was no direct link with Brancaster, why the Way drives on to the coast as if to emphasise the importance of that part of the coast, why it passes through so few settlements (Brettenham and Woodcock Hall developed beside the road, not the other way round) and why the Icknield did not fit their purpose. The Peddars' purpose. therefore, might be seen as strategic, political, logistical and perhaps even agricultural. Whether or not its military usefulness was in decline from the moment of its completion is another matter. The fact remains that never again did the Iceni rise in rebellion.

The Roman road system in East Anglia is still not fully known. Gaps are still being filled in, and new sections and roads discovered (see 13). To a certain extent this uncertainty remains true of the Way. Its line from Ringstead to the coast is not absolutely clear, but it seems to have reached the sea somewhere west of Holme, or

near Old Hunstanton, and in roughly the same area as the Icknield. Indeed, the Way may have forked at Ringstead, sending out one branch towards Old Hunstanton (St. Edmund's Point) and another west of Holme. From Castle Acre it seems likely it ran over Hungry Hill to re-emerge close to Moat Farm and thus by Palgrave to Pickenham, where it again becomes obscure. From thence a direct route would have taken it more or less by Houghton Farm to Woodcock Hall and across the boundary of Merton Estate, through Stonebridge, over the Brettenham–Bridgham road close to Thorpe Farm, across the Little Ouse at Blackwater Ford near Rushford, by Bardwell and Barningham, close to Stanton Chair (which may also have been a fork in the road) and on to Ixworth. The O.S. map of Roman Britain (14) then suggests links with Long Melford, Braintree, Chelmsford and London, and possibly with Colchester. A more recent map (13) shows the Norfolk stretch of the Way crossed or joined by seven other Roman roads on its journey from the coast to the Suffolk border. In 1934 ((2), Feb. 7th) an investigation into the status of the route, and its line across the country, was carried out for the Highways (King's Lynn) Committee of the Norfolk County Council, and was published in detail.

Whatever the disputable minutae of the matter, the road's value to the Romans is not in question. During the latter part of the 1st century, or thereafter, Woodcock Hall and Brettenham gradually came into existence, perhaps as staging posts, Caistor-by-Norwich (Venta) emerged as the administrative centre of the area, and the villas of country gentlemen of modest station were built. The light soils were intensively cultivated, some of the mixed-leaf forests in central Norfolk were cleared for farming, and for a time at least Briton and Roman worked and sometimes lived side by side. This period of comparative peace and development lasted perhaps 250 years until, once again, raiders threatened from the sea. Brancaster's Saxon shore fort—occupied for a time by the Dalmatian Cavalry—sprang into existence as one of a chain of protective forts. But Roman rule was on the wane, and the troops were gradually recalled to Rome. By about 425 grass was growing again over the ruins of towns and roads, forts and villas, and the Dark Ages had arrived.

The latter years of Roman occupancy were marked by insecurity, and the first movement of Anglo-Saxon settlers in eastern England began shortly before the legions hurried away. Indeed, some of the new settlements were the results of treaty agreements between the Roman government and the barbaric mercenaries. From 425 onwards, however, there was a long period of unease. More settlers arrived by boat (using the Icknield and the Peddars?) and the name Swaffham suggests that Swabians were among them. By AD 500 substantial occupation had taken place throughout North and West Norfolk and Breckland. Many of the newcomers used the rivers leading inland from the Wash to establish themselves around the margins of the Fens, and Armstrong (15) comments, "Saxon villages were set off the roads partly for security from raiders, partly, it is said, because the colonizers feared that the mysterious, long straight trackways were haunted. In any event, Fring, Docking and Great and Little Massingham (all 'ing' villages) are a mile or so off the route. . . ."

Many of the linear earthworks to be found in the area may date from this period, Bircham Ditch and Launditch controlled traffic on the east/west Roman road; the Fossditch guarded the Drove Road; Devil's Dyke, in Cambridgeshire, blocked the Icknield Way; all ample indication, perhaps, of widespread unrest. But worse was to come. Following the arrival of Christianity in about 597, the Vikings and the Danes came, too, and from c. 845 to c. 920 there was intermittent pillage and burning. For 13 years the "Great Army" marched across England, and the invaders found a decaying society. The land was still marked by the network of Roman roads, but many of the villages had not survived the earlier raids and the region's political significance had begun to wane. In 855 Edmund landed at Hunstanton from Saxony

Looking north towards Threxton and Woodcock Hall, this shady spot is only a few minutes' walk from the Watton to Little Cressingham road.

(he is still remembered by St. Edmund's Point, and by Bury St. Edmunds) to be crowned at Sudbury. In 869, however, he was killed by the Danes, thus giving rise to St. Edmund's feast day, which was a national holiday in the middle ages, and thus, indirectly, to innumerable pilgrim paths, some remembered, some forgotten, and some, it must be admitted, connected more with Walsingham (founded 1061). After 920 Anglo–Danish East Anglia became part of a united England, and for two generations at least there was peace and prosperity. Late in the century, however, the invaders returned and in 1010, under Thorkell, they went straight to where Ulfcytel was awaiting them. This great confrontation between the English and the Danes took place at "Hringmara Heath," usually believed to be (16) either Ringmere (East Wretham) or Rymer, four miles south of Thetford, but usually associated with the former. Alas, the East Anglian levies soon broke; the men of Cambridgeshire, it is said, held their ground for a time, but they, too, were finally slaughtered, and for three months the Danes harried the countryside, sacking Thetford as they had done six years earlier. Of the battle of Ringmere, two sagas survive, and one translation of the "Heimskringla" reads, "To Ulfketel's land came Olaf bold/ A seventh sword-thing he would hold/ The race of Ella filled the plain/ Few of them slept at home again/ Hringmara heath was a bed of death/ Haarfayer's heir dealt slaughter there"; and another, "From Hringmar field the chime of war/ Sword striking shield rings from afar/ The living fly/ The dead piled high/ The moor enrich/ Red runs the ditch."

Thetford survived, however, and by 1066 East Anglia was probably one of the most densely populated regions in Britain. Indeed, estimates based on the Domesday Survey (17) place Thetford among the six most important towns in

England. By about 1100, however, it was again undergoing a decline which this time persisted for a hundred years; in addition, the town began to move from the south side of the Little Ouse to the north. The economic centre also began to shift from Breckland, where it had been since Neolithic times, and Norman aristocracy and soldiery finally established their domination. By about 1200 there were some 80 monasteries in Norfolk and Suffolk, and villages and hamlets appeared as more and more land was cultivated. For as long as Thetford and Breckland remained as the leading agricultural and economic centre, so the importance of the Icknield crossing of the Little Ouse and the Thet at Thetford remained. And thus, in turn, the opposite was true. Thus it is also possible that the Peddars took on a subsidiary role from a very early date.

Little of the story remains, for the history of the Peddars over the following 500 years is submerged in the history of the rest of the county, and in some of the major events of that period—the dissolution of the monasteries, the shift in habitation centres, the agricultural revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries, the depression of the 19th century, and the advent of large-scale afforestation which began in the Brecklands in 1922. All contributed in different ways to a significant landscape change, for travellers in the 17th and 18th centuries had described scenes of sandy desolation created by the cutting down of trees and continued grazing (which prevented regeneration) by cattle, sheep and rabbits. "White's 1845 Norfolk" (18) reported that in the previous 70 years nearly 200,000 acres of commons and heath had been enclosed, but there were still extensive open sheep walks and rabbit warrens.

As far as the Peddars Way is concerned echoes of history remain. C. H. Lewton-Brain ((2), May 21st, 1976), in discussing the 16th and 17th century Lestrange estate maps, said the Way "is clearly shown as a major road on all maps and in its final stages called Seagate Way, though there is no sign of a harbour. The fields . . . were divided into strips. . . . A Snettisham map shows near Fring, along the Peddars Way, an area called Smithdon Hill, and here the representatives of the old Hundred of Smithdon used to meet near, but not on, a very important Roman site." Faden's Map of Norfolk (19), published in 1797, shows it, too. Then, the open heaths of Croxton, Santon and Mundham stretched far and wide, and Sturston and Stanford both had warrens. By 1837 (J. P. Dodd (7)) the parishes of Great and Little Hockham were 58 per cent arable and 19 per cent common, fen and heath. In 1901 it was reported (12) that "from Fring to Castle Acre it (the Way) is still in use, and for six miles south of Fring it forms a parish boundary". Of course, the coming of the railways in the 19th century, and the changing pattern of rural life, saw to it that the Peddars, and many roads like it, gradually passed into partial if not complete disuse.

One final problem. Why Peddars? P. H. Wilson ((2), April 14th, 1965) suggested that the Roman name for it may have been "Limes Icenorum," on the grounds that "limes" (pl. limites) was army jargon for a way cleared for a military advance, but really, the Roman name for the road is not known. Rainbird Clarke (17) comments that the name is of little importance since it has been applied indiscriminately to ancient and modern tracks in various parts of East Anglia, and W. G. Clarke ((2), October, 1923) noted that a road near Beechamwell was, at the time of Henry IV, known as "Le Peddersty". Therefore, it was not restricted to "our" road. White's Directory" (18) says it is "now called the Pedler's Way", and it is difficult to ignore the feeling that it means no more than "foot" road, and that the name came into use in the 15th or 16th century. Jane Hales (20) incidentally, says "ped" is a wicker basket for transporting fowl.

But all this is academic. As R. D. Clover ("Dim Corridors", 1948) commented, it

Near this spot beside the Brettenham–Bridgham road the Way once crossed the River Thet and the Romans built a camp. Behind the trees on the far bank is Thorpe (Woodlands) Farm, the Forestry Commission camp site.

"passed into disuse many hundreds of years ago, apparently because the place it was laid down to reach disappeared and there was nowhere for it to go". But it was used—or the area was used—by Neolithic man, Roman soldier, Saxon colonist, Dane and Norman, medieval pilgrim, drover, pedler, packhorse and tractor. Now, what remains of it is silent and lonely, the home of skylark and rabbit, pheasant, butterfly and deer, a place of poppy, hawthorn, buttercup, bracken, fern, gorse and daisy. Much of the agger has been lost, alas, and many of the ancient hawthorns have gone, too. But Norfolk's legacy of green lanes, lokes and droveways is still there for those who wish to seek them. As for the Peddars Way, it remains, too, touched by history and surrounded by fascination.

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20. "The East Wind", Jane Hales, Veal
21. "The Black Fens", A. K. Astbury, EP Publishing
22. "Thornham Excavations, 1960", Norfolk Research Committee
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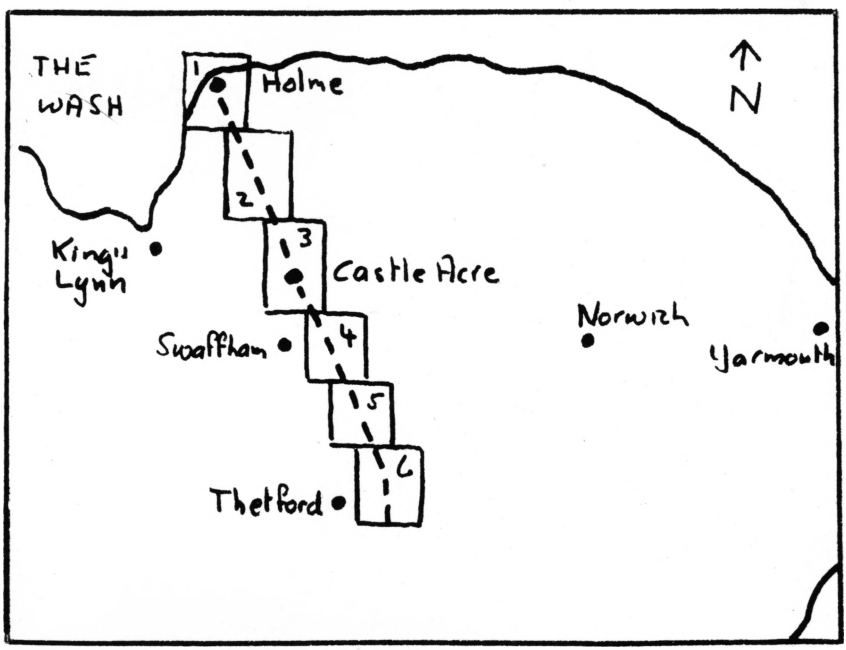
Suggested additional reading and references

(The list, by no means exhaustive, contains a selection of titles dealing in small or large part with aspects of the Way and/or the countryside around it.)

"Thetford Forest guide map", Forestry Commission
"Nature in Norfolk", Norfolk Naturalists Trust, Jarrold
"East Anglia", Helen Clarke, Heinemann
"East Anglian Forests", Forestry Commission
"The Peddars Way", Rogers, Graham & Hickman, Brewhouse Publications 1974
"The Norfolk We Live In", George Nobbs Publishing
"Dry Docking", G. Hagan, 1975
"Portrait of Norfolk", D. Yaxley, Hale
"Field Archaeology in Great Britain", Ordnance Survey
"A Short History of Suffolk", D. Wilson, Batsford

Maps and Route

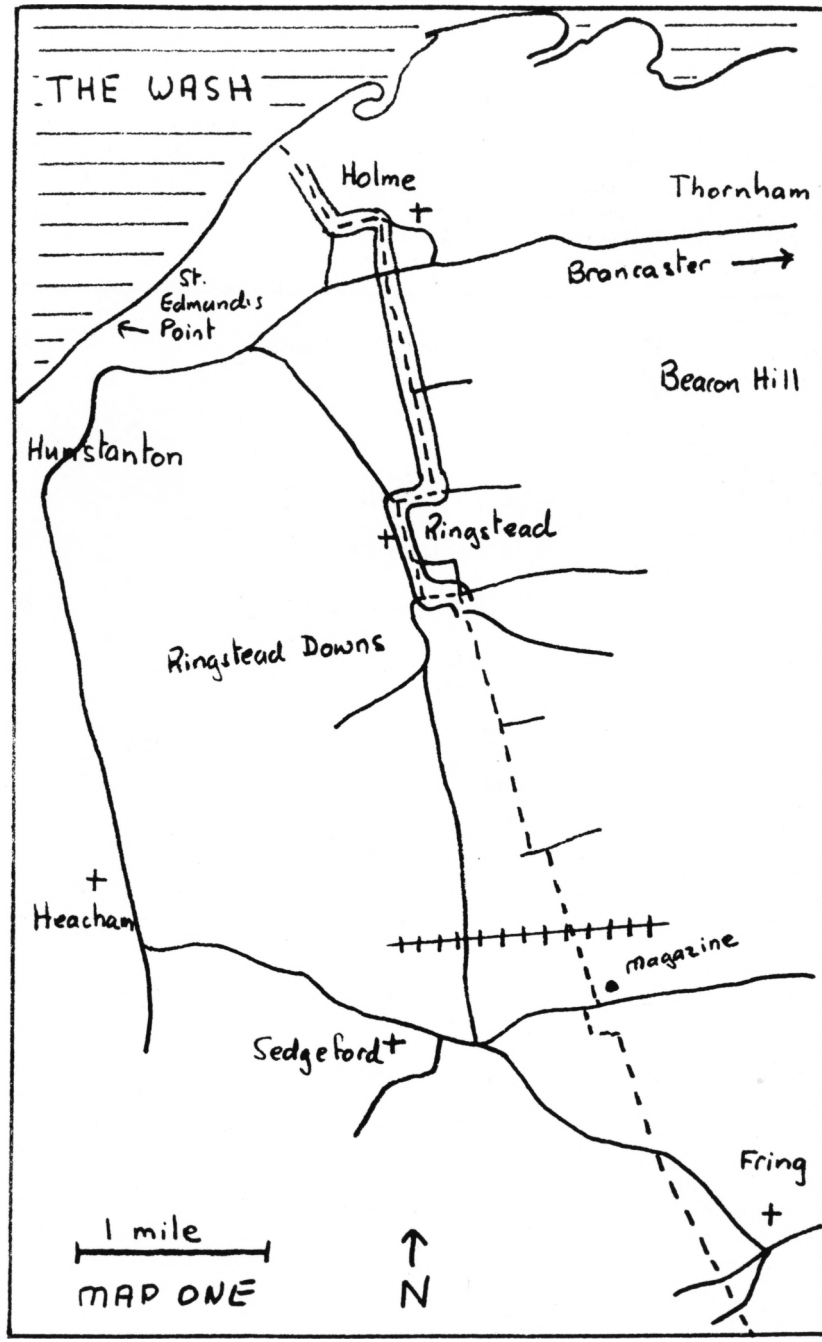


Map section—an explanation

The map section is divided into six, for convenience, and it assumes—as does the route description, for no reason other than clarity—that the traveller is walking from north (or from Holme) to south Knettishall).

My suggested route along the Way is indicated by a broken line; in addition, where the suggested route takes the walker over metalled roads, this is indicated, too, by a black line on either side of the broken line. Because the route of the Peddars Way is uncertain or indistinct in certain areas, I have indicated one or two alternative routes. And because in some places the Way still lies over private land, or has disappeared altogether, I have merely indicated a route round the problem.

There is no particular merit, incidentally, in starting from Holme; indeed, a good case can be made out for starting from Knettishall, for travelling towards the sea can be infinitely pleasurable when, as happens just outside Ringstead, the sea is glimpsed for the first time. It is purely a matter of taste, or convenience. For best results in all things, however, I do recommend the use of a set of O.S. maps.

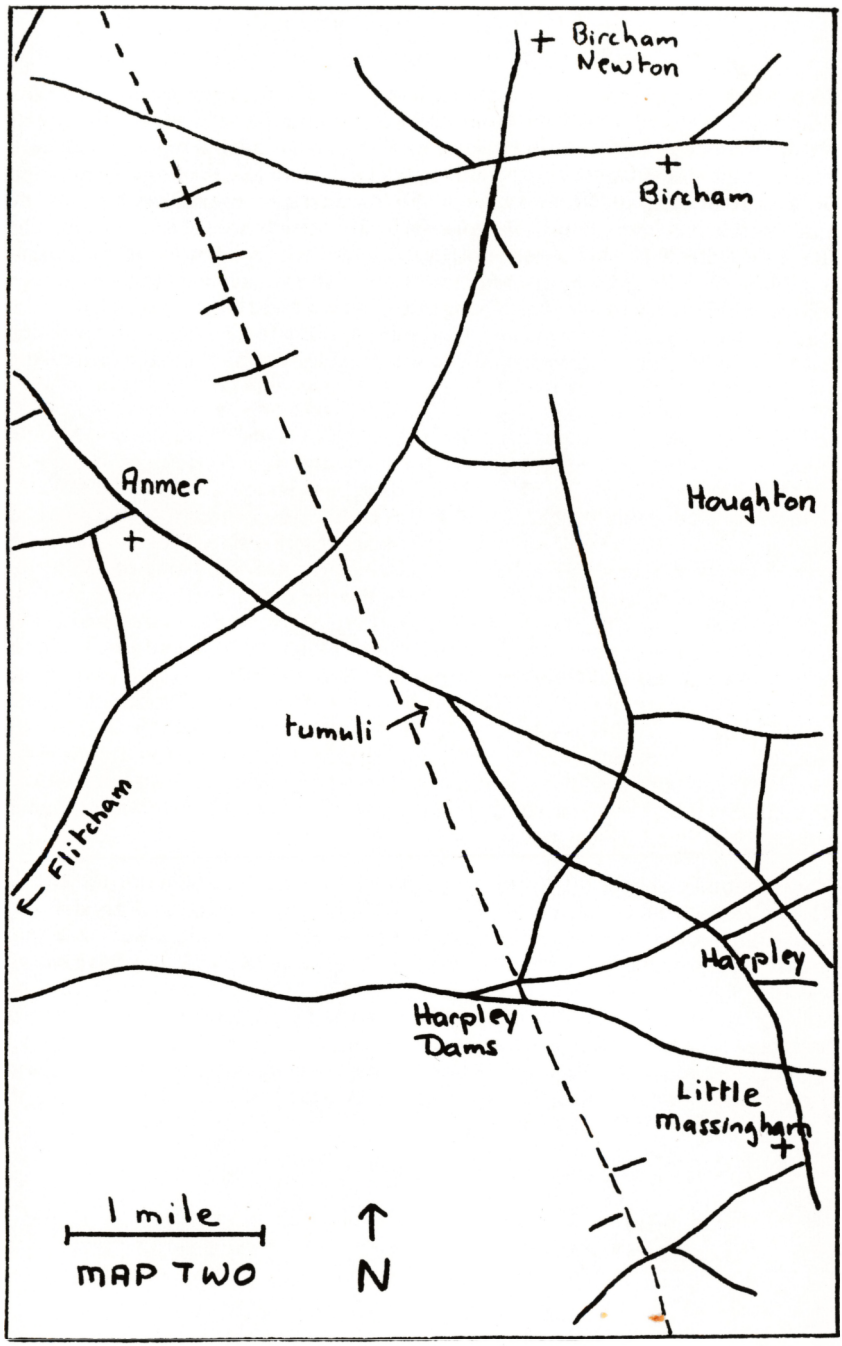

THE WASH
Holme
Thornham
Brancaster
St. Edmunds Point
Bearon Hill
Hunstanton
Ringstead
Ringstead Downs
Heacham
magazine
Sedgeford
Fring
1 mile
MAP ONE
N

1. *Holme to Fring*

Even when standing on the seashore one cannot be certain where the Way terminated. Anyway, walk from Holme beach, turn into the village, then first right, and cross over the A149. You are now on the Ringstead road, but not until you have gone through this village (by the church and the pub; turn left, then right; ignore the Docking road, keep straight on) will you see your first sight of the Way proper. The route is indistinct here. Keep to the edge of the field, climb two stiles, and follow the line of the trees. When you reach another track turn left for a few yards, then right, and follow the Way over the disused railway line and on down to Magazine Cottage and the A1067. Turn right towards Sedgeford, but within a few yards turn left off the road beside a row of cottages and follow the track left then right. Keep to the hedgeline on the side of the field and you will eventually cross the Sedgeford–Fring road. From here the track is undulating and clearly defined.

Where was the sea terminus? Astbury (21) suggests it may have been on Middle Bank, which is "an isolated extension of the chalk and sandstone ridge ... and was dry land 2000 years ago". In 1896 Mr E. Milligen Beloe, in "The Paddar's Way", wrongly concluded that the "head of Way" at Holme was protected by two guarded enclosures divided by a bank with two large moats on either side. They are, however, comparatively modern marsh banks. Consequently, the road out of Holme is wrongly signposted as the "Peddars Way", for the real road is further to the west. In 1950, at Holme, an Iron Age bit and other trappings were discovered beside the Way; while over to the east, a mile or two out of Holme, is an interesting gridiron pattern of roads around Choseley Farm once thought to have been a part of the Roman colonization of the area. The theory is now discounted. Thornham "signal station" (Beacon Hill) has been excavated several times, and archaeologists concluded (22) there had been Neolithic and Bronze Age occupation, followed by the construction of a fortlet at about the time of the Boudiccean revolt. In the 6th or 7th centuries it had been used as an inhumation cemetery; but there was no sign it had ever been used as a signal station.

St. Edmund's Chapel at Hunstanton is thought to have been built during the late Norman period, but it fell into ruin after the Dissolution. Brancaster (Branodunum) was a Roman shore fort, the ruins of which were largely destroyed circa 1770. It is an extensive site which is still being excavated. At Ringstead the Way may have swung towards Old Hunstanton or perhaps forked west of Holme. At this point also the Peddars and the Icknield are only about a mile apart. Sedgeford Magazine is thought to have been a Magazine of Arms at the time of Cromwell. In 1965 an Iron Age gold torc was found near here, while the site of a Romano-British villa has been discovered in a field just to the east of the Way near Fring.


Bircham Newton
Bircham
Houghton
Anmer
tumuli
Flitcham
Harpley
Harpley Dams
Little Massingham
1 mile
MAP TWO
N

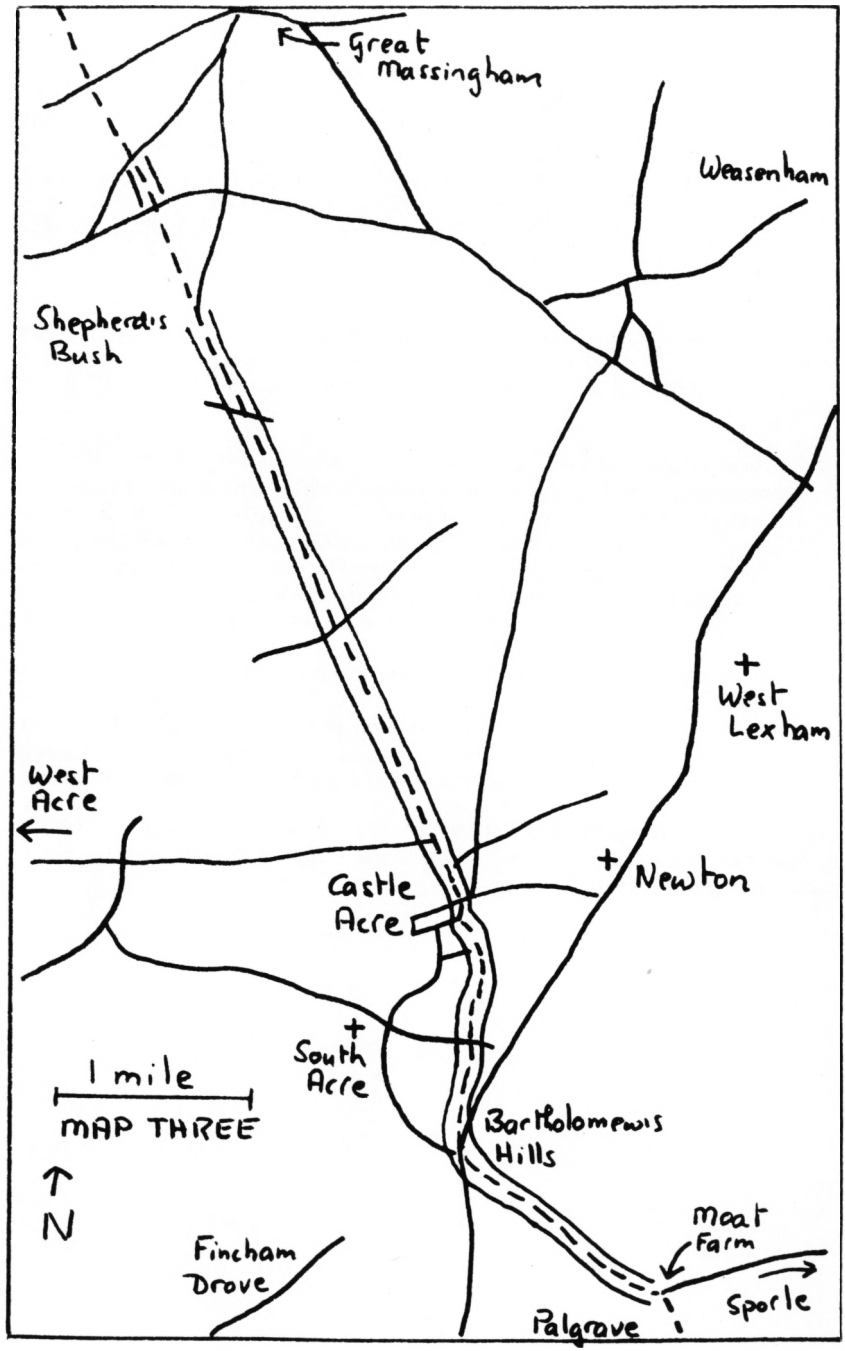
2. *Fring to Massingham*

The Way provides some good, straight walking along a rough track pressed close on both sides by agricultural fields. Look out on this stretch, incidentally, for a group of round barrows and for a lavender field, and keep an ear open for skylarks, for this section of the route from Fring, over Harpley Dams and on by Massingham, is one of the loveliest and loneliest of them all. Here, on a chill summer evening on the "roof of Norfolk" cold winds cut across the fields, but during the day it is different. There are high, wide skies and empty fields, or perhaps a tractor humming in the distance. There are nearly always skylarks and rabbits, and sometimes a solitary figure hoeing in a field.

This section also typifies, alas, much of what has happened to the landscape since the Second World War. There have been great losses of hedgerow trees and ancient hawthorns, and certain parts of this lap add emphasis to the description "prairie farming".

There is one particularly interesting section not far from the Birchams. Here the Way is sheltered on both sides by bracken and high hawthorns, and sometimes in the summer it is necessary to wade through waist-high undergrowth. It can be wet underfoot, too, if there is heavy dew. We camped here one night and pitched the tents on the "verge" beside the Way, and only later discovered we were in fact resting on a small ridge. Further exploration showed there was a ridge on both sides of the track, about two feet high on the east side and slightly less on the west. The Way here is at its widest, and I counted off about 16 paces from the top of one ridge to the top of the other, making it about 45 feet across. I am not certain what it is, but I am inclined to think it may be nothing more than a parish boundary. Indeed, the numbers of parish boundaries which allude to the line of the Way add testimony to its presence and its importance. In any event, this is one of my favourite sections of the Way and it is here, I think, that the feeling of solitude is at its most intense.

One word of warning. Having descended to Harpley Dams and reached the A148, the Way continues straight across the main road. But have a care, for the traffic reaches racetrack speeds.


Great Massingham
Weasenham
Shepherds Bush
West Lexham
West Acre
Newton
Castle Acre
South Acre
1 mile
MAP THREE
N
Bartholomews Hills
Moat Farm
Sporle
Fincham Drove
Palgrave

3. *Massingham to Palgrave*

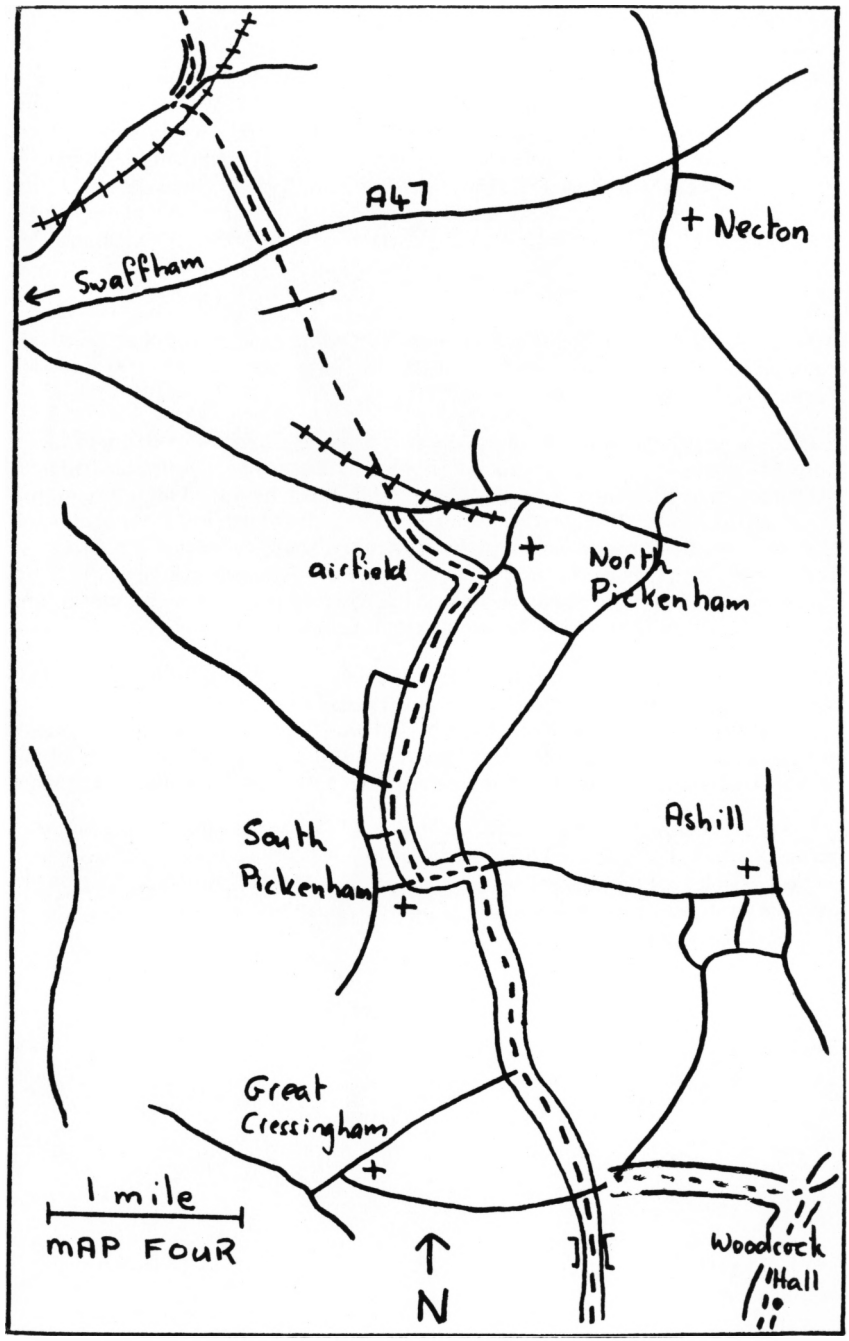
The route is straight-forward until Shepherd's Bush is reached where, alas, the Way is covered by the Great Massingham to Castle Acre road. Take care here, too, for the road is narrow, the traffic speeds by, and there is little in the way of grass verges; single file, therefore, is recommended. As for the road, it is a $3\frac{1}{2}$-mile desent into Castle Acre. Leave Castle Acre by the archway on Stocks Green and descend to the little bridge over the Nar. Follow the road down to the junction of the A1065 (Swaffham to Fakenham), cross it, and take the road to Sporle over Bartholomew's Hills as far as Moat Farm. Turn right again on to the track immediately opposite Moat Farm.

From Castle Acre to Moat Farm is, of course, another of the "missing" sections, but it seems reasonable to suppose that the original route went direct from Moat Farm to Castle Acre over Hungry Hill.

Faden's map of Norfolk (19) shows the Way firmly established north out of Castle Acre until it appears to peter out at Shepherd's Bush into a footpath to Great Massingham. A little further north of Shepherd's Bush, near the Gayton road, this same map (dated 1797) shows eight footpaths or roads converging at the same spot. Not far from here, too, another east/west Roman road, running from Brisley to Terrington, once crossed the Way (13). Near the turn-off to Bartholomew's Hills yet another Roman road crossed the line of the Way en route from Brampton and through Fincham, where it is known as the Fincham Drove.

Castle Acre is highly recommended as a stopping place, for it is full of fascination with its church, castle and priory. It lies at the crossing point of the Nar and is also on an old pilgrim route to Walsingham, and was thus in an important strategic position. The castle, built in the 11th century, is still being excavated. The Cluniac priory, founded c. 1090, is a most attractive ruin maintained in a fine state of repair.

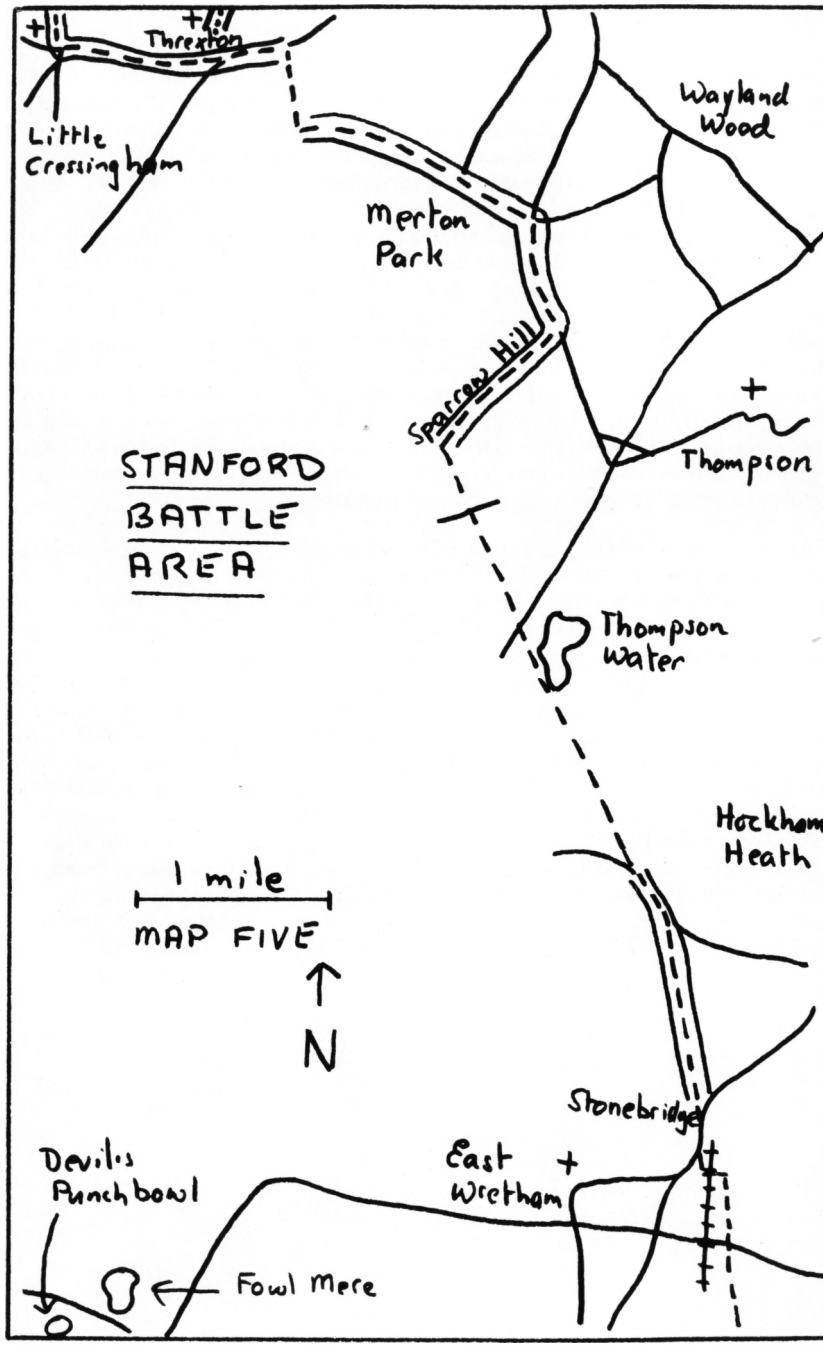
Castle Acre is the only place of size the Peddars Way passes through on its journey across Norfolk, but a Roman presence here has always been a subject of dispute. It seems possible that the village itself grew in the 8th and 9th centuries; but despite its obvious strategic importance Rainbird Clarke ((2), August 1st, 1952) dismissed the idea of a Roman station here.


A47
Swaffham
Necton
airfield
North Pickenham
South Pickenham
Ashill
Great Cressingham
1 mile
MAP FOUR
N
Woodcock Hall

4. *Palgrave to Cressingham*

A dull section inasmuch that only a fragment of the original Way remains, the rest—particularly from North Pickenham to Threxton—having apparently disappeared off the face of the earth. Having left Palgrave Hall on the right, turn momentarily right on to the Swaffham to Sporle road then left over the old railway bridge. A metalled road brings you to the busy A47 (Swaffham to Norwich) and a fine $1\frac{1}{2}$-mile section of the original Way. It is still used as a farm track, and it is very often muddy. A short distance down this track you will come to "Swaffham crossroads", the meeting place of several old footpaths. Pass under the derelict railway bridge and over to the North Pickenham road. To the west the North Pickenham mast (a 350ft GPO micro-wave relay tower) is a useful marker. Turn right at the village cross-roads and follow the road to South Pickenham. Pass the church and Pickenham Hall, then first right to Little Cressingham. At the Great Cressingham–Saham Toney cross-roads there are two possibilities. You can continue into Little Cressingham, turn left at the pub and along the B1108 (Watton) road; or turn left towards Saham Toney and then first right to follow the road by Woodcock Hall and Threxton church. The Way here has disappeared, but there is little doubt it once followed a route by Houghton Farm and Moat Farm.

Swaffham, with its fine market place, is well worth a visit. In 1797 the England cricket team beat Norfolk by 13 runs here. Faden's map (19) also shows a gap in the Way through the Pickenhams, but it does mark a tollgate at the crossroads of the A47. There have been several archaeological finds in the area. At Little Cressingham there is an important group of barrows containing Wessex culture grave goods. At Ashill (13) a ditch and bank, containing a deep shaft, has been excavated, while at High Banks there is an enclosure of unknown date. The Woodcock Hall area, where the Way crossed a tributary of the Wissey, has produced an abundance of Romano-British finds. Evidence suggests the presence of a civilian community after the Boudiccean revolt, perhaps living beside a Roman community. This important site is roughly equidistant between Brettenham and Castle Acre, but this may be a coincidence. The Blackwater Ford (the Wissey) may have been much wider in Roman times, and there may have been a bridge here. Recent evidence (23) suggests that Sand Hills, on the south bank of the Blackwater, may have been the site of an early Claudian fort. The area has not been excavated, and there is little at ground level to see.

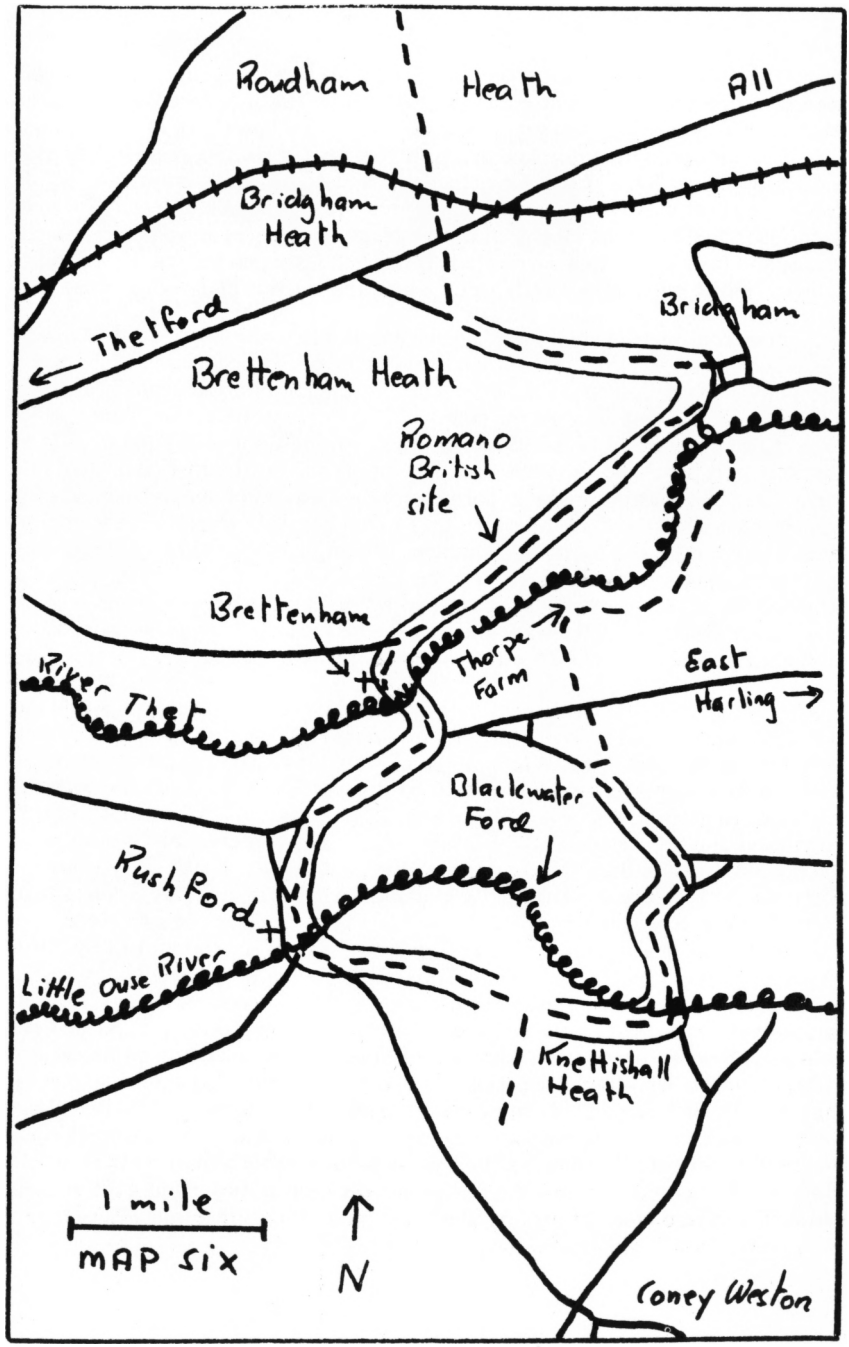

Threxton
Little Cressingham
Wayland Wood
Merton Park
Sparrow Hill
Thompson
STANFORD BATTLE AREA
Thompson Water
Hockham Heath
1 mile
MAP FIVE
N
Stonebridge
Devils Punchbowl
East Wretham
Fowl Mere

5. *Cressingham to Stonebridge*

From the B1108 the Way is marked by a hedge-lined track leading south. It is the second turning past the Threxton church cross-roads. The line of the Way across the Merton Park boundary is not yet open to the public, so follow the road into Merton, turn right towards Thompson and first right to Sparrow Hill. Rejoin the Way near the barrier to the Battle Area. Obey the signs and do not stray into the trees; the Army still controls this section. Pass Thompson Water and pick up a metalled road to Stonebridge. Near the Dog & Partridge cross over the road, walk over a small bridge and turn left on to a narrow lane by some houses and then under a derelict railway bridge; then immediately right, where the track is plain once more.

Not far from Merton village is Wayland Wood, where the story of the "Babes in the Wood" is said to have unfolded. This section provides a first flavour of the "new" Breckland (a name coined in the 1890s). Once covered by infertile, sandy heaths it is still one of the dryest areas in the country. The Forestry Commission started its project of afforestation in the 1920s and there are now some 80 square miles of forest, mainly Scots and Corsican pine. The forests and heaths are rich in plant life, birds (crossbill, redstart, nightjar, shrike, stone curlew) and animals (red and grey squirrel, red and roe deer). Merton Park, which contains several archaeological sites, also contains some oaks of great age. The original Merton (Meretown) may have been a station on the Way, and there are round barrows and the site of a Roman villa in the vicinity. Thompson Fen was enclosed about 1850 and a sluice allowed the Wissey to fill the lake, which was reopened in 1975 as Thompson Water Fishery. Faden (19) marks a ford or sheepwash here.

Ringmere (possible site of the Danish battle) and Langmere are unique Breckland pools in that the water level depends not on rainfall but on ground water fed from the chalk underneath. Near Wretham the Harling Drove road sweeps in from the west. Of unknown age it was once used by drovers, but fell into disuse with the advent of the railways. Clarke (24) suggests it may have struck out west towards Hockwold and thence across the Fens by boat. Three pieces of land nearby were once called Kettle Brig, Upper Kettle Brig and Lower Kettle Brig, perhaps corruptions of the Danish name of Ketel, but the name Kettle Bridge is common in Norfolk. From Sparrow Hill to Stonebridge the Army can often be seen at exercise. The Battle Area was created in 1942 when five villages (Stanford, Lynford, Tottington, West Tofts, Buckenham Tofts) were evacuated. It now comprises 25 square miles, and British and foreign troops and air forces train there. Tenant farmers still farm about 1800 acres, and despite the military presence the Battle Area is a sanctuary for deer, otter, squirrel and many birds, including stone curlew, bittern and harriers. The Area includes mixed woodland, fir plantations, lakes, marshes, streams, derelict villages and the last remaining piece of original Breckland heath. It is also a treasure house of largely undisturbed archaeological sites, including prehistoric flint mines, churches, round barrows, and parts of the Icknield (and the Peddars) Way. A few years ago a skeleton dating from 1500 BC was unearthed. The Battle Area is a strange and beautiful anachronism.


Roudham
Heath
A11
Bridgham Heath
Thetford
Bretteham Heath
Bridgham
Romano British site
Brettenham
River Thet
Thorpe Farm
East Harling
Blackwater Ford
Rush Ford
Little Ouse River
Knettishall Heath
1 mile
MAP SIX
N
Coney Weston

6. *Stonebridge to Knettishall*

The most complicated part, perhaps, because of a missing section over Brettenham Heath and because it is not (legally) possible to cross the rivers Thet and Little Ouse other than by road bridges. Cross the A11 (Thetford to Norwich) and take the sandy track heading roughly south over the heath. This track eventually peters out on private land, but after about 600 yards it joins a narrow secondary road. Turn left and walk to Bridgham. There are now two choices, a road walk or a forest walk. For the road walk, turn right and then right again and follow the straight road to Brettenham. About a mile from Brettenham you will pass near the Romano-British site area. In Brettenham, turn left and cross the bridge, turn right towards Thetford and first left to Rushford. Cross the bridge over the Little Ouse and take the lane towards Knettishall. Just over 2000 yards from the bridge you will meet the Peddars Way again as it branches right (and roughly south) over the heath. You are now in Suffolk, and to all intents and purposes a short walk on the heath marks the end of the journey. For the forest walk, leave Bridgham by the Brettenham road but after a few yards turn left on to a footpath leading across the meadow. A stile leads to the bridge and then to a forest road. After a short distance turn right on to Forestry Commission footpath leading to Thorpe (Woodlands) Farm; turn left at the campsite farmhouse, cross the Thetford–East Harling road and take the footpath over the field to the South Lopham road. Turn left, then right, and right again to Knettishall bridge. Cross the bridge and turn right towards Rushford; after about 1500 yards turn left on to (marked) Peddars Way track across the heath.

Once the A11 is crossed (Roudham Cross once stood at the cross-roads, incidentally) little remains of the original track. At Thorpe Woodlands campsite there is little of the Way to see, other than a grassy track, the narrow River Thet and the meadow, which was once marshland. The gravelled causeway (Drove Way Ford) is still buried. It is a beautiful area, though. The Peddars Way also crossed the Little Ouse between Knettishall and Rushford at a place called Black Water Ford; indeed, Faden (19) shows four paths converging at the same crossing point. Blackwater, incidentally, is a not uncommon name in Norfolk. After it crossed Rushford and Knettishall heaths the Way is thought then to have travelled on into Suffolk, close by the Roman villa at Stanton Chair, and connected with the rest of the road system near Ixworth. Much of the route, however, remains obscure.

Between East Harling, Gasthorpe and Knettishall is the line of another Roman road, while on nearby East Harling heath is an embankment called Devil's Ditch. The whole area is rich in archaeological sites. To the west is Great Snarehill where R. D. Clover ((2), May 24, 1976) believes a loop of the Icknield Way branched between Barrow's Clump Buildings and Wretham Heath. Thorpe Woodlands is a delightful spot and well worth exploring (if you are camping, of course, you will need a chemical toilet), but the main attraction, perhaps, is Thetford. Here the prehistoric Icknield Way crossed the two rivers and here the Anglo-Saxons built a town. Thetford's Castle Hill remains, there is a museum at the Ancient House, a new shopping precinct on the waterfront and associations—through Thomas Paine, and through neighbouring air bases—with the United States.

Length—As the crow flies the length of the Way from Knettishall to Holme is roughly 45 miles (the walking distance is nearer 55) but suitable distances for shorter walks can easily be selected. It is possible to start (or finish) further south than Knettishall (Ixworth, for example) but there is no clear path and in essence the Way has disappeared from the area. Remember, too, that the Little Ouse still has to be crossed at either Rushford village or Knettishall, and the Thet at Brettenham.

Signposts—It is inadequately signposted in some sections, though it is usually marked in the vicinity of main roads. Providing you maintain a fairly straightforward line on the track itself there is little chance of taking a wrong turn.

Condition—The Way is fragmented in a sense that it is not a continuous path. In some places it disappears altogether (Palgrave to Castle Acre, etc); some parts of it are buried under main roads (north for $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles out of Castle Acre, etc); some sections are still on private land (north of the Little Ouse, etc); and others are occasionally obstructed. Most sections, particularly north of Castle Acre, are used as farm service roads. Surfaces change regularly from sandy, stony paths, rutted farm tracks and metalled roads to footpaths where tall grass and greenery sometimes impedes progress, depending on the time of year.

Camping—There are no official camp sites on the Way. The path is not suitable for frame tents and there are no facilities. Camping is not permitted within the boundaries of the Forestry Commission's forests or in the Stanford Battle Area (Stonebridge to Merton); nor is it permitted to light fires here. There is a camp site at Holme and a Forestry Commission site (chemical toilets required) at Thorpe Woodlands, four miles from East Harling. For details of all sites in the vicinity (Narborough/Pentney Park, Gt. Massingham, Hunstanton, Snettisham, Stanton, Swaffham, West Harling, for example) contact the East Anglia Tourist Board, Ipswich; the Tourist Information Office, Norwich; or the Forestry Commission, Santon Downham (see addresses).

Backpacking—Because of its comparative shortness and relative ease of surface, the Way is not a real test for "serious" walkers.

It is suitable only for small tents as the verges tend to be narrow and rough and cultivated land often presses close on both sides. Enough space can usually be found for a lightweight tent but there are difficult areas, notably Little Cressingham to North Pickenham, and Palgrave to Castle Acre. It is possible to find good pitches, for example, from Shepherd's Bush to, roughly, Fring. There is another useful spot at the "Swaffham cross-roads" (see Map 4). The Ostrich Inn at Castle Acre has limited facilities for small tents, and meals are available. It is best to book. (The Ostrich, Stocks Green, Castle Acre, King's Lynn, Norfolk; tel. Castle Acre 398.)

Always pitch on the verge, never across the Way itself. Never let guy ropes stretch across the path, either. The Way is used regularly during the day by farm vehicles, and by courting couples in cars at night.

Carry a minimum of essential supplies, for some of them can be difficult to obtain. Most of the villages have a small shop of some kind, however. Shops and/or post offices can be found at: Holme, Ringstead, Castle Acre, North and South Pickenham, and Stonebridge. There is a telephone box in most of the villages.

Boots are recommended, for the flinty tracks tend to have uneven surfaces. Even in warm weather heavy morning dew can sometimes make it very wet underfoot. There are no drinking taps, but water can be readily obtained from nearby pubs and houses. Observe the Country Code.

Buses, trains—Closest railway stations are Thetford, Harling Road, Brandon,

King's Lynn and Bury St. Edmunds. None is really convenient for walkers (the first three are best). New paytrain timetables are issued each May 1st, so for the latest timings it is best to check with British Rail. (From the B1106 between Brandon and Weeting, incidentally, it is possible to walk the Harling Drove through the forest to join the Way at Roudham or Stonebridge; from Harling Road the Way can be joined at the A11.)

Roads criss-cross the Way throughout its length. Consequently there are buses in the vicinity, though timings tend to be few and far between. Best advice: decide where you want to join the Way, then check with Eastern Counties Omnibus Company for the best or nearest service (see addresses).

Y.H.A.—There are Youth Hostels at Hunstanton and King's Lynn (see addresses).

Car parks—At no point on the Way is there an official car park—or for that matter an ice cream or refreshment stall. Even so, motorists contemplating short visits can usually find a safe, suitable and temporary parking space somewhere in the vicinity. It is possible to park cars at Holme, Castle Acre and Stonebridge.

Pubs—They can be found at: Holme, Thornham, Titchwell, Ringstead, Sedgeford, Hunstanton, Great Bircham, Great Massingham, Castle Acre, Swaffham, Little Cressingham, Watton, Thompson, Stonebridge, and Harling Road. In some cases it is necessary to walk a few miles to find them.

Suggested picnic places—Knettishall Heath, Bridgham picnic area (near East Harling), Stonebridge-to-Hockham road, Devil's Punchbowl (near Fowl Mere), Castle Acre.

Maps—Anything less than one-inch are generally inadequate, for they lack information and interest. The O.S. 1:50,000 series (No. 132, North West Norfolk, etc) is more up to date. Enthusiasts seeking greater detail might look at the O.S. 1:25,000 series, though they are becoming increasingly expensive. The following are needed: Hunstanton TF 74, Docking TF 73, Hillington TF 72, Narborough TF 71, Castle Acre TF 81, Swaffham TF 80, Shipdham TF 90, Caston TL 99, and East Harling TL 98.

Bridle paths—Bridle paths have been established over certain sections of the Peddars and the Icknield Ways. British Horse Society information on the subject can be obtained from: Mrs. K. Cleasby-Thompson, B. H. S. Norfolk Bridleways Office, Red House, West Tofts, Thetford; or the chairman of the East Anglian Trail Riders' Association, Mrs. D. Holmes, The Cuttings, Bawdeswell, Norfolk.

Suggested short walks—Brettenham Heath across the A11 (Thetford to Norwich) to Stonebridge Dog & Partridge, 3 miles approx; Stonebridge to Sparrow Hill, 4 miles approx; North Pickenham (old railway bridge) to A47 (Swaffham to Norwich) $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles, approx; Shepherd's Bush (north of Castle Acre) to Sedgeford-Fring road, $11\frac{1}{2}$ miles approx.

This latter section is criss-crossed by minor roads and footpaths, and so is particularly suitable for short walks. There is a particularly lovely stretch north of the Docking–Flitcham road not far from Bircham. The related Harling Drove track from the B1106 near Weeting (or from the Brandon–Mundford road) also makes an enjoyable walk through the forest, particularly if Santon Downham is visited en route. From the Harling Drove the Way can be joined at either Roudham or Stonebridge which, from the Mundford road, is about 11 miles.

Battle Area—The Ministry of Defence controls a section of the Way (roughly, Stonebridge to Threxton) which is included in the Stanford Battle Area. The boundaries of the battle area are clearly marked and fenced. Public access to the Way is permitted providing you do not stray off the path and providing you obey the signs. It can be noisy in this area, for military exercises are regularly held there. It is foolish, incidentally, to stray off the path. The area is littered with explosives.

Rights of Way—A certain amount of the Way runs (if it exists at all) across private property, usually farmland. There are two basic rules, the first being the understanding that evidence of a footpath is no indication of a public right of way. Therefore, if you are caught and challenged, don't argue; apologise and retreat. The second rule is to avoid the former. If in doubt, or if confronted by private property, simply ask permission, politely, to cross. Then make sure you do not abuse the privilege. Suffice to say that my colleagues and I, having asked permission, have never once been refused—and we have met some interesting people into the bargain.

The Future—Consultations between Norfolk County Council and the Countryside Commission over the formal designation of the Way and the proposed North Norfolk Coastal Path (from Hunstanton to Cromer) as an official Long Distance Footpath, are still proceeding at the time of writing. The proposed Peddars Way/Coastal Path link, which would run from Knettishall to Cromer, would thus provide a walk of about 80 miles. As far as the Peddars Way stretch is concerned the plan would allow for many of the "blank spots"—currently in private hands—to be opened for public use; these additions to the route would follow as closely as possible the ancient line of the Way. It would also provide for footbridges over the rivers Thet and Little Ouse. Parking facilities in several areas might also be provided.

Places to visit in vicinity—Brancaster, Brandon, Bury St Edmunds, Cockley Cley Iceni village, Castle Rising, East Wretham nature reserve, Grimes Graves Neolithic mines, Houghton Hall, Hunstanton, Kilverstone wildlife park, King's Lynn, Lynford Arboretum, North Norfolk coast (Thornham, Titchwell, etc), North Elmham, Oxburgh Hall (at Oxborough), Ringstead Downs, Sandringham, Scolt Head, Swaffham, Santon Downham, Thetford, Thetford forest, Walsingham, Weeting, etc.

Opening times and additional information can be checked at the National Trust or Tourist Information Centres (see addresses).

The area also provides ample opportunities for visiting churches, for there are a great many within a few miles of the Peddars Way.

To the east of the area, of course, is Norwich, Broadland, and some famous seaside resorts.

Useful addresses

East Anglian Tourist Board—14 Museum Street, Ipswich, Suffolk
Norfolk Archaeological Unit—Union House, Gressenhall, Dereham
Ramblers' Association—Mrs. J. Le Surf, 6 Atthill Road, Norwich
National Trust—Blickling Hall, Aylsham
Norfolk Naturalists' Trust—72 The Close, Norwich
Backpackers' Club—Mr. Ken Wisdom, 67 Cotman Fields, Bishopgate, Norwich
Norfolk County Council—County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich
Norfolk Society—Mr. J. N. Raffe, 6 Gurney Lane, Cringleford, Norwich
Norwich & District Footpath Society—Mr. Richard Downs, 16 Highfield Avenue, Brundall, Norwich
Forestry Commission—Forest Office, Santon Downham, Thetford
Tourist Information Centre—14 Tombland, Norwich
British Rail—Norwich Thorpe Station, Norwich
Eastern Counties Omnibus Company—79 Thorpe Road, Norwich
Youth Hostels Association—Regional Secretary, East Bay House, East Bay, Colchester